Analysis of School and Community Data: Key Findings on Educational Quality

Social Mobilization Campaign for Educational Quality (SMC-EQ)

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Submitted by:
CREATIVE ASSOCIATES INTERNATIONAL, INC.

Under:
ABEL 2 Project

Contract No.:
HNE-Q-00-94-00076-03

Funded by:
United States Agency for International Development (USAID)

October 1999

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October 1999

Research conducted for the ABEL 2 Consortium:
Academy for Educational Development
Creative Associates International, Inc.
Education Development Center
Florida State University
Harvard Institute for International Development
Research Triangle Institute

Office of Field Support and Technical Assistance
Center for Human Capacity Development
Bureau for Global Programs, Field Research, and Support

U.S. Agency for International Development
Contract No. HNE-Q-00-94-00076-03

I. INTRODUCTION

This report has been prepared to share what the Social Mobilization Campaign for Educational Quality (SMC-EQ) has learned about the condition of education and the attitudes surrounding those conditions through baseline data collected in January 1999. The SMC-EQ has followed the model adopted in the earlier SMC, using what it has learned in communities to guide its strategies and form a continuous loop of research informing and defining how SMC-EQ activities proceed. However, much of the information collected as part of the SMC-EQ baseline data could be useful to the Ministry of Education and other projects, all working toward similar goals in education.

In the three districts where the SMC-EQ began the first phase of its work, data were collected in 30 percent of the schools and the communities which send their children to those schools. Thirty schools in seven zones of Balaka, 27 schools in eight zones of Salima, and 62 schools in 13 zones of Mangochi were visited in early 1999[1]. The data were collected by the people who most need to use that information, the Primary Education Advisors (PEAs) and Community Development Assistants (CDAs) who work in those schools and communities. The act of collecting the data was, therefore, part of a process of establishing links between district offices and the communities they serve by providing the individuals who make that link with an opportunity to better see, from the perspective of the teachers, parents, and pupils, the state of the local education system.

The data include the opinions of teachers, parents, and pupils who were asked in focus groups and interviews what they believe the components of a quality education to be. Because these groups were asked separately, the differences in their answers are as important as the factors they all agreed are critical. Their agreements provide clear indications of what is considered to be important to education on the local level; their differences provide insight into the tensions between school and community, which often prevent working toward a common goal of quality education.

The SMC-EQ baseline data also includes information about conditions at the schools which were visited. The government of Malawi made a great effort to collect basic statistics about conditions in schools in 1997. Contrasting the SMC-EQ data with these statistics allows an examination of possible changes over intervening years and validates the information through the consistence between sources. However, the SMC-EQ data also goes beyond the Ministry of Education statistics in several ways. Some of the areas addressed in the SMC-EQ findings deal with the process of education on the local level, issues not included in the government data, such as: What are the activities of the School Committee? What issues are discussed in staff meetings? The other major differences between the two sources of data lies in how the SMC-EQ information was collected, each school being treated as a total, integrated set of information. Consequently, the relationships among conditions can be explored in the SMC-EQ data in ways such as: What is the impact of the number of classrooms or latrines on the ability of a school to retain pupils through Standard 8? How is the pupil to teacher ratio affected by the number of teachers' houses?

[1] All tables and charts in this report are based on this sample although there are some variations in the actual number of cases included in each statistic due to incomplete data relevant to some issues.

Section II of this report presents what was learned about the conditions found at schools. When applicable, all data are examined in contrast to the government's 1997 statistics[2]. Section III reports what teachers, parents, and pupils said are the factors they believe to contribute to a quality education, examining both the reappearing key factors and the different perspectives among the three groups. Section IV sifts this information and these different voices to highlight a few areas that emerge from both the conditions at schools and the factors mentioned by teachers, parents, and pupils in an attempt to pinpoint and identify areas in need of greater attention. Hopefully these suggestions can help to guide future SMC-EQ activities and the decisions of policy makers.

II. WHAT ARE THE CONDITIONS AT SCHOOLS?

A. Infrastructure

The connection between school infrastructure and the quality of education is not direct nor obvious, but it is one that is on the minds of teachers, parents, and pupils as will be seen in Section III. Although all communities want schools that they can be proud of, the conditions reported at most of the schools in these three districts are far enough below that standard to have serious impacts on the amount of teaching and learning that can take place.

Table 1: Ratios between Pupils or Teachers and School Infrastructure

Ratios		Balaka	Salima	Mangochi
Number of Pupils per Classroom	- SMC-EQ - MOE	97 (138)[3]	124 (147)	122 (136)
No. of Teachers' Houses per 100 Teachers	- SMC-EQ - MOE	38 (21)[4]	28 (20)	37 (29)
Number of Pupils per Latrine	- SMC-EQ - MOE	95 (77)[5]	116 (105)	90 (73)

Table 1 provides a summary by district of a few of the shortages that can have a serious impact on quality of schooling. The ratio of pupils to classrooms is almost double the size of class per teacher (60:1) that has been used by the government for the placement of teachers. This means that an average of one half of the classes in a school is forced to meet outside or combine with another class to squeeze into a single classroom. When classes meet outside, rain frequently prevents the classes from being held, which shortens the number of teaching/learning days that are available, and the environment often provides many distractions for young children. If pupils

[2] Malawi Government, 1997, "Education Basic Statistics." The district of Balaka, in which the SMC-EQ collected data, did not exist in 1997; it was created later when the Machinga District was subdivided. Although not strictly equivalent, Balaka data will be compared to Machinga data from the "Education Basic Statistics."

[3] Pupil to classroom ratios for Machinga, Salima, and Mangochi from Malawi Government, 1997, "Education Basic Statistics," p. 26.

[4] Ibid., p. 27.

[5] Ibid., p. 33.

are crowded into the existing classrooms to avoid these problems, then over-crowding limits the ability of teachers to teach and pupils to learn. The number of teachers' houses that are available limits the number of teachers who can live near the school. Teachers who must travel considerable distances to reach schools are more often tardy and/or absent. Schools also report difficulties recruiting and keeping good teachers when there is no housing available for them. The number of latrines available can have an impact on the health of the pupils, which affects their ability to learn, and discourages older pupils, especially girls, from continuing their education.

There are variations among the three districts, with Salima having the worst supply of essential infrastructure. The government data on the supply of classrooms, teachers' houses, and latrines that was collected in 1997 indicates the same pattern, with Salima having fewer of these important structures than the other two districts. When the SMC-EQ data is compared to the Ministry of Education data, the patterns between the two sources of information are the same and all three districts appear to have improved the ratio of classrooms to pupils and teachers' houses to teachers during the intervening two years. On the other hand, the ratio of pupils per latrine appears to have become worse in all three districts.

The impact of the number of classrooms, teachers' houses, and latrines on pupil dropout can be estimated by using a ratio of Standard 8 pupils to Standard 1 pupils as an indication of how well each school retains its pupils. Table 2 presents a quick summary of the relationships between this ratio and the number of pupils per classroom, the number of teachers' houses per teacher, and the number of latrines per pupil in each school.

Table 2: Relationships between Ratio of Standard 8 to Standard 1 Enrollments and Number of Classrooms, Teachers' Houses, and Latrines

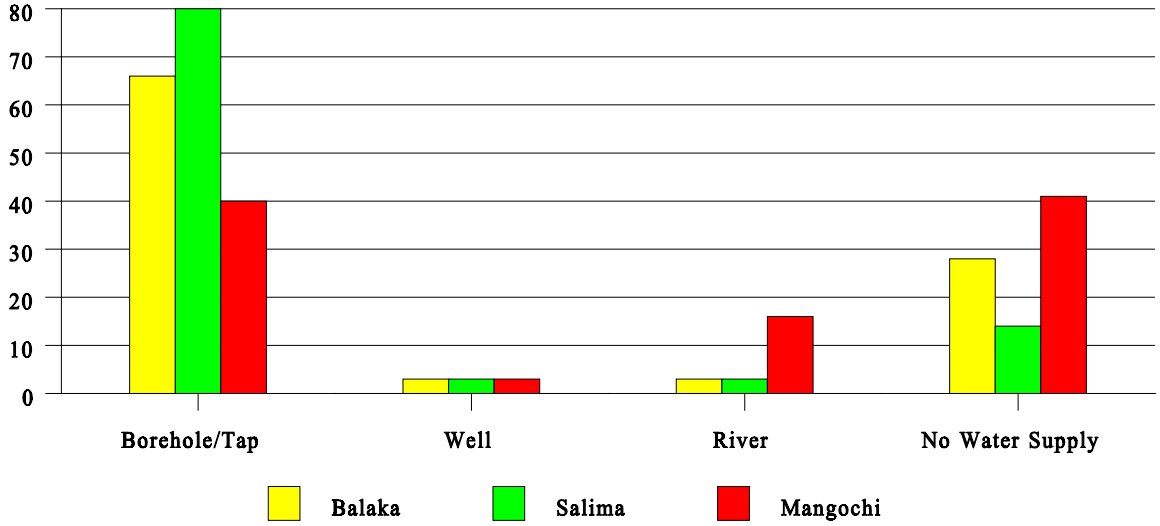
Relationship	Pearson's Correlation	Probability
Ratio S1:S8 to Enrollment/Number of Classrooms	+ .51	p=0.00
Ratio S1:S8 to Number of Teachers/Number of Teacher's Houses	+ .28	p=0.01
Ratio S1:S8 to Enrollment/Number of Latrines	+ .63	p=0.00

Table 2 indicates that having more classrooms per pupils, more teachers' houses per teachers, and more latrines per pupil all are related to having more pupils in Standard 8 relative to Standard 1 enrollment. If the ratio of Standard 8 to Standard 1 does act as an indication of how well schools prevent pupils from dropping out, then a low number of pupils per classroom and per latrine, and a low number of teachers per teachers' houses are significant factors in the retention of pupils. In addition, a high number of pupils per teacher at a school, which could suggest reluctance of teachers to be posted at the school and difficulty in retaining teachers, was negatively correlated (-.25 p=0.01) with the number of teachers' houses per teachers at these schools.

The availability of water at the school can also have an impact on pupil health. Chart 1 indicates that, while the majority of schools in two of the districts have an acceptable water supply, many of the schools, especially in Mangochi, do not.[6] The lack of a water supply at the school can lead to pupil absenteeism or tardiness when they have to leave school in order to get water.

B. Pupil Enrollment and Dropout

Chart 1: Percent of Schools with Types of Water Supply by District



One indication of quality in education can be that children go to or are sent to school, because enrollments traditionally drop when the quality of schooling becomes established as poor in the perceptions of parents and pupils. While Malawi is still too close to the optimistic flood of pupils who entered school when fees were eliminated in 1994 for any drops in enrollment to appear, one reason that the Ministry of Education is now focusing on the quality of education in Malawi is that if the quality deteriorates significantly, then enrollments can be expected to also drop, eliminating the gains that Malawi has made in access to education. Table 3 gives the enrollment data of boys and girls by standard and district.

[6] It is difficult to contrast this data to the information on water supply in the Ministry's 1997 data (Ibid., p.31), which did not include the percent of schools with no water supply but provided much more complete data on the types of condition of the water supplies that did exist.

Table 3: Enrollment of Boys and Girls by Standard and District

Standard	Balaka			Salima			Mangochi		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
S1	3045	3183	6228	3025	2863	5888	7826	3025	15342
S2	2836	2504	5340	2637	2229	4866	5055	2637	10287
S3	2375	2293	4668	2081	1620	3701	4441	2081	9397
S4	1687	1604	3291	1151	948	2099	2633	1151	5968
S5	1210	1205	2415	874	649	1523	1729	874	3961
S6	986	836	1822	667	453	1122	1175	669	2808
S7	815	656	1471	464	299	763	739	464	1926
S8	736	534	1270	521	244	765	682	521	1780

In all three districts the drop in enrollment between Standard 1 and Standard 2 is high, with Mangochi showing a steeper loss of pupils than the other districts. In Balaka, Standard 2 is 86 percent of Standard 1 enrollment; in Salima, Standard 2 is 83 percent; but in Mangochi, Standard 2 is only 67 percent of Standard 1 enrollment. The decrease in enrollments in all districts is especially pronounced among girls. Table 4 illustrates that less than one-third of the number of pupils who enter in Standard 1 enroll in Standard 5, the point by which they could be expected to be able to read and write in Chichewa. An extremely small percent of pupils, especially female pupils, enroll in Standard 8 where they will complete primary school. Part of what quality of education means is that pupils learn the basic skills necessary for their adult lives. When pupils drop out before the point where they have mastered those skills, what they have learned is often forgotten and little benefit is realized either personally or nationally.

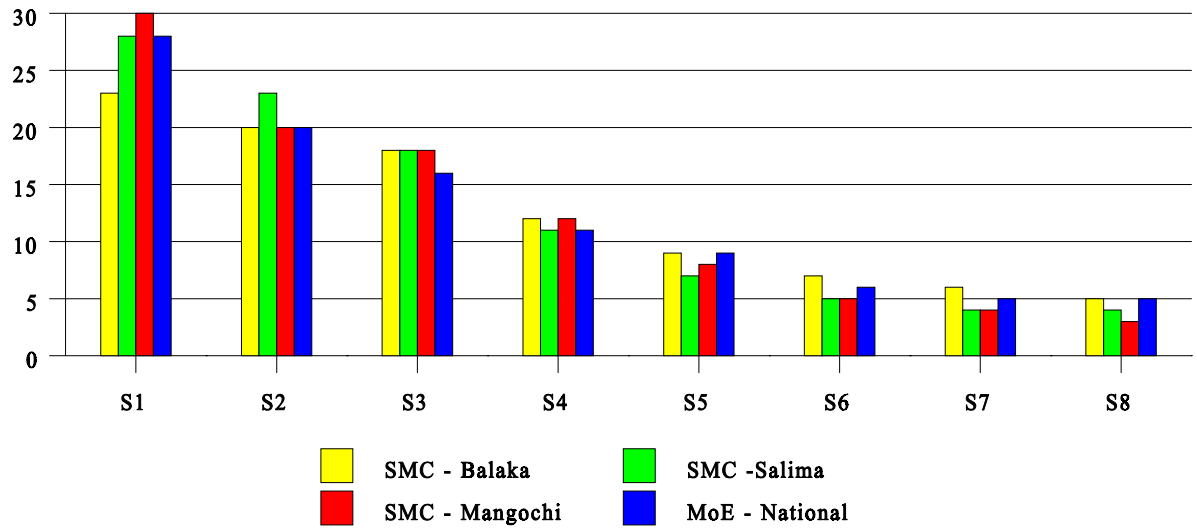
Table 4: Percent of Standard 1 Boys and Girls Enrolled in Standard 5 and Standard 8 by District

Standard	Percent of Standard 1 Enrollment					
	Balaka		Salima		Mangochi	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
S5	40%	38%	29%	23%	30%	22%
S8	24%	17%	17%	8%	15%	9%

All three districts show a similar pattern in the distribution of pupils among standards, a pattern that repeats that of the national figures collected by the government in 1997[7]. Chart 2 illustrates these patterns and demonstrates the very small percentages of those pupils who enter school in Standard 1 who can be expected to reach Standard 8.

[7] Ibid., p. 10.

Chart 2: Percent of Total Enrollment in Each Standard



C. Teacher Training, Placement, and Management

1. Teacher Training

No one would question the importance of teachers to a quality education. The Government of Malawi has worked hard to supply a large number of new teachers to schools in order to meet the large influx of pupils that occurred when school fees were discontinued in 1994. Because of the speed by which the government attempted to supply teachers at a ratio of 60 pupils per teacher, many of the teachers were not fully trained.

Table 5 indicates that only around 45 percent of the teachers in the schools where data were collected are currently qualified, which matches very closely the 1997 government data on teacher qualifications. The percentage of the remaining teachers who have received, or are now receiving the shortened MIITEP training varies among the districts, but still leaves an average of almost 20 percent of teachers with no training. An untrained teacher, whatever his or her skills in the academic subjects might be, lacks a basic orientation to teaching methods, lesson planning, classroom management, pupil assessment, and many other important skills. Without these skills, teachers are not only limited in their ability to offer a quality education, but they can also create friction with the parents and pupils, who have expectations for what an education should include (see next section).

Table 5: Teacher Training by District

Type of Training	Mean Percent of Teachers at Schools		
	Balaka	Salima	Mangochi
Qualified Teachers	44% (44%)[8]	48% (51%)	42% (44%)
MIITEP Trained Teachers	32%	45%	37%
Untrained Teachers	24%	7%	21%

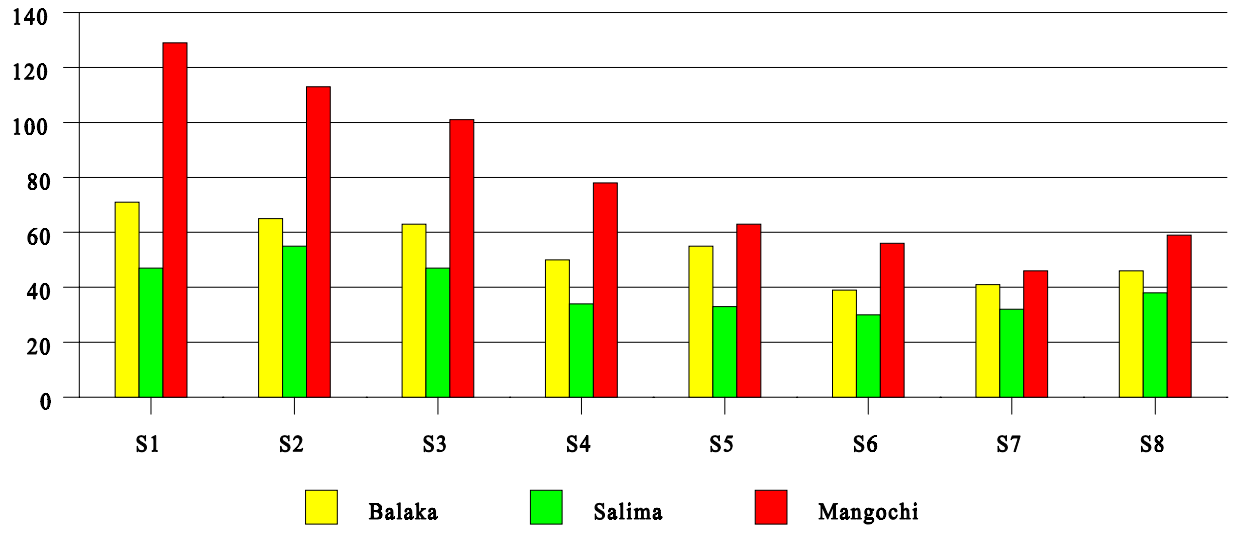
2. Teacher Placement

Many of the schools in this sample do meet the 60 pupils per teacher ratio proposed by the government as an overall guide to teacher allocation, and some even have a lower ratio of pupils to teachers. On the other extreme, however, are examples of lone teachers who had 238, 259, and 296 pupils in their Standard 1 classes. Among this sample of schools, the ratio of pupils to teachers was 63:1 in Balaka, 65:1 in Salima, and 81:1 in Mangochi. Although these figures appear to mean that, at least in Balaka and Salima, most of the schools are close to meeting the government standard of 60:1, most pupils will never be in a class that has only 60 pupils.

Chart 3 indicates the standards in which the teachers assigned to schools were teaching[9].

Although there is an overall drop in the number of teachers from first to last standard, the drop in pupil enrollment from first to last standard (Chart 2) is much steeper. When pupil enrollment by

Chart 3: Number of Teachers by Standard and District



standard is combined with teacher placement by standard, average pupil to teacher ratios can be estimated as shown in Table 6. The Ministry of Education data indicates a similar pattern with

[8] Ibid., p. 19.

[9] In cases in which teachers shared the instruction of a class, the teachers were counted according to the standard to which they were assigned.

slightly higher pupil to teacher ratios in the first few standards and slightly lower ratios in the other standards. What Table 6 demonstrates is that most of the two-thirds of pupils who drop out by Standard 5 (Table 3) will never have been in a class with only 60 pupils.

Table 6: Number of Pupils per Teacher by Standard and District

Standard	Balaka		Salima		Mangochi	
S1	87	(116)[10]	125	(159)	119	(133)
S2	82	(96)	88	(89)	91	(96)
S3	74	(79)	79	(70)	93	(68)
S4	66	(56)	62	(54)	76	(55)
S5	44	(50)	46	(38)	63	(47)
S6	47	(40)	37	(30)	50	(35)
S7	36	(29)	24	(27)	42	(28)
S8	28	(24)	20	(20)	30	(25)

The wide difference in pupil to teacher ratios from Standard 1 to Standard 8 is the result not only of decreases in pupil enrollment in each successive standard, but also is due to the assignments that are frequently made once teachers have been placed at a school. Table 7 provides a few examples of the most common pattern found in schools. Generally, in spite of the decreased number of pupils in the higher standards, a similar number of teachers are assigned to each standard with a slight increase in the number of teachers in Standard 8. The understandable preference is to have at least one teacher responsible for each standard. However, each of the example schools has more than eight teachers, which means second and third teachers have been assigned to some standards.

[10]Ibid., p. 23.

Table 7: Examples of How Teachers are Assigned to Standards

Standard	School 1			School 2			School 3			School 4		
	Pupil Enroll	Teachers		Pupil Enroll	Teachers		Pupil Enroll	Teachers		Pupil Enroll	Teachers	
		M	F		M	F		M	F		M	F
S1	142		2	359	2	1	182	1	1	202		2
S2	101		2	212	1	1	159	1	1	161	1	1
S3	85		1	185	1	1	157		2	197	1	1
S4	71	1		130	1		87	1	1	99	1	1
S5	55	2		89	1		76	1		80	2	1
S6	51	1		70	1		56	2		77	2	1
S7	43	2		58	2		42	2		33	2	1
S8	50	3		52	2		25	2		38	3	1

The quality of a school has traditionally been judged by the number of pupils from that school who pass their final exam and/or are admitted to secondary school. Communities judge schools by this criteria and schools feel under pressure to increase the number of pupils selected; schools respond to that pressure by increasing the amount of resources made available to pupils in Standard 7 and, especially, Standard 8. Because a high number of teachers are assigned to the upper standards, which creates the low pupil to teacher ratios seen in Table 5, not enough teachers are available for the lower standards to reach the government's goal of 60:1 even when the overall number of teachers sent to the school is sufficient.

When a ratio of Standard 8 pupils to Standard 1 pupils is used as an indication of how well each school retains its pupils, the ratio of teachers to pupils for the entire school is only slightly positively correlated (+.11, p=0.32). If, however, the S1:S8 ratio is related to the ratio between the number of pupils in Standard 1 and the number of teachers in Standard 1, then a very high positive correlation exists (+.87, p=0.00). In other words, a placement of teachers within schools which provides more teachers per pupil in Standard 1 is more closely related to the ratio of S1 to S8 than is the overall number of teachers at the school. If the goals are to retain more pupils longer, then redistributing teachers to produce a better pupil to teacher ratio in Standard 1 could make a real difference.

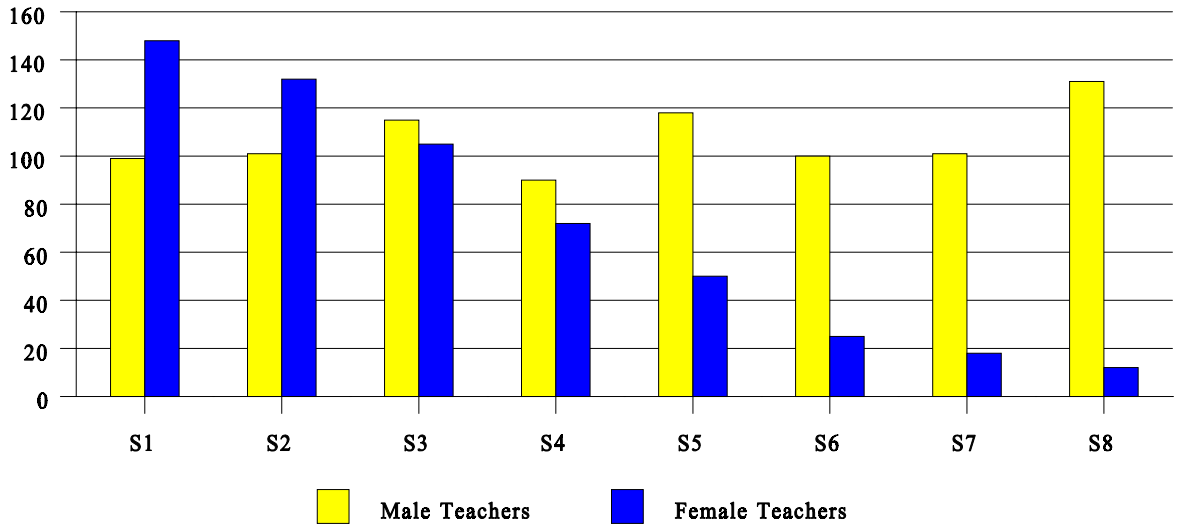
From Standard 5 on, the rate of dropout decreases and the quality of education could be expected to improve. Unfortunately for the "survivors," survival is not necessarily a measure of the fittest. In Malawi, as elsewhere, factors that contribute to dropout perpetuate a system of educating only a small percentage of children. In a society where adults need to have acquired essential skills during their years in school, no matter how few years that may have been, perhaps the goal of education needs to be shifted to providing a useful, quality education to as many pupils as possible, which could include focusing more resources such as teachers in the first standards.

The data collected for these schools does not, unfortunately, include which standards were being taught by qualified teachers, but the 1997 data from the Ministry of Education[11] shows a pattern in all three districts from a low of around 20 percent of the teachers in Standards 3 and 4 being qualified, to a high of around 75 percent of the teachers assigned to Standard 7 and 95 percent of those in Standard 8 being qualified.

The SMC-EQ data do, however, indicate the gender of the teachers by standard. The pattern that emerges in teacher placement by gender is illustrated by the examples in Table 7. Chart 4 shows how all of the male and female teachers were assigned within the schools of this sample.

While the majority of the teachers in the first two standards are female in the these districts, by

Chart 4: Male and Female Teacher Placement by Standard



Standard 4 or 5, just when the class sizes are beginning to be manageable (see Table 6), there are more male teachers in almost all of the schools. It is extremely rare to find any female teachers in the last two standards. Other research has reported the reason most frequently given by headteachers as "women are better with infants," while the female teachers protest that they are never given the opportunity to teach in the higher standards (Wolf et al, 1999, p. 85)[12]. This is important not only in terms of the disproportional teaching loads for male and female teachers, but also for the message about the "value" of a male or female teacher that is sent to the pupils. The government national data collected for 1997 show a similar pattern of female teacher placement by standard[13], with a high of around half of the teachers being female in Standards 1 and 2, but only around 5 percent of the teachers being female in Standard 8.

[11] Ibid., p. 21.

[12] Wolf, Joyce, Grace Lang, L.L. Bekett Mount, Diane VanBelle-Prouty, 1999, Where Policy Hits the Ground: Policy Implementation Processes in Malawi and Namibia, Technical Paper No. 95, USAID: Washington, DC.

[13] Malawi Government, 1997, p. 22.

3. Teacher Management

The data collected as part of the SMC-EQ project provides a unique insight into teacher management through questions that were asked about staff meetings. All districts reported an average of about 2.5 staff meetings per term[14], ranging from 14 to 1. What was discussed in those meetings is relevant to any discussion of quality education. What Table 8 shows is that about a third of staff meeting time was devoted to lessons, teaching, and pupil performance, while an almost equal amount of time was focused on pupil behavior. Relatively little time was spent informing teachers of new policies, involving them in choices of placement and scheduling, or discussing their own behavior.

Table 8: Issues Discussed at Staff Meetings by District

Issue	Percent of Total Issues Mentioned		
	Balaka	Salima	Mangochi
Lessons, Teaching, and Pupil Performance	29%	37%	31%
Ministry News and New Policies	4%	-	1%
Placement of Teachers by Standard and Subject	4%	12%	9%
Schedules for School Year, Classes, Exams, and Projects	10%	5%	7%
Pupil Behavior: Discipline, Punctuality, and Absenteeism	34%	32%	31%
Teacher Behavior: Discipline, Punctuality, and Absenteeism	19%	14%	21%

The discussion just completed on teacher placement suggests that this is a issue which should involve teacher participation and a careful examination of how to distribute teachers in a manner that best produces a quality education for the most pupils. The comments of parents and pupils, which will be examined in Section III, indicate that teacher behavior is often a major source of friction between school and community, while teachers' comments indicate the same lack of importance placed on the issue as does the relative lack of attention that the issue receives in staff meetings.

[14]Mean number of staff meetings per term: Balaka 2.8; Salima 2.3; Mangochi 2.8.

D. Teaching and Learning Materials

The number of textbooks available to pupils contributes to the quality of education in a number of ways. The most obvious consequence of a shortage of textbooks is that each pupil does not have a book for the subject being taught. The average of around two and a half books per pupil in the first three standards contrasts with the higher number of major subjects being taught during those years. The limited number of books in the classroom means the pupils must share, not always a bad arrangement if the class is small enough for the teacher to adjust the pairing to the relative skills and personalities of the pupils. One of the most serious consequences of not having a book for each pupil is the inability of teachers to assign homework and the inability of pupils to examine the material on their own.

Table 9 illustrates the total number of textbooks what were available to each pupil in each standard of the schools visited. The steady decrease in the number of pupils in each standard generally makes more books available in the upper standards. In Standard 7 and Standard 8, in two of the districts, a sufficient quantity of textbooks appears to be available so that pupils have a textbook for most subjects; in the third district, Balaka, even the pupils in these standards have a shortage of books. By Standard 5, two-thirds of the pupils who initially enrolled have already dropped out of school, often without ever having had access to textbooks that they could take home for further study.

Table 9: Number of Textbooks per Pupil by Standard and District

Standard	Balaka	Salima	Mangochi
S1	1.99	2.03	2.82
S2	2.18	1.57	3.28
S3	2.78	2.73	3.16
S4	2.66	3.78	3.67
S5	2.39	4.48	5.17
S6	2.68	4.98	5.40
S7	2.60	7.73	7.04
S8	2.94	7.00	8.94

Among the other resources available to pupils are extra curricular activities, which often provide an opportunity for pupils to develop special skills and can motivate pupils to continue their schooling through the enjoyment offered by these activities. Schools were asked if they had such activities, what kind and how many. While schools reported an average of around four extra curricular activities per school [15], the range was from 10 activities to none.

[15] Mean number of extra curricular activities per school: Balaka 4.2; Salima 4.4, Mangochi 3.7.

E. School Committee and Parent Teacher Associations

All of the schools from which data were collected had School Committees, most of them about four years old.[16] The range, however, was great: some reported that they had had a School Committee for 25 years, while others said their committees were only a year old. There was also a significant variation among the means of the three districts, Salima's School Committees being older in general and Mangochi's usually being younger.

The School Committees reported that they generally held scheduled meetings and, at the point when the data was collected, it had been approximately three months since the last meeting[17], although the range was large, from a high of 20 months since the last meeting. Meetings were usually attended by about seven members in all districts[18], with a range from ten members to two attending.

The role that School Committees play in increasing the quality of education is not clearly agreed upon, although the role that they could play is generally accepted as being great. There are, however, many obstacles between simply having a School Committee in existence and having a School Committee that plays a real role in promoting quality education, although having functioning School Committee is clearly the first step. One obstacle can involve the relationship between the School Committee and the school. Teachers often feel that the school is their domain and that community members lack the skills and technical knowledge to play an important role. When one group of teachers was asked if community members were constructively involved in education issues, they replied, "Not at all. They mind their own business." In addition to often not feeling that their involvement will be welcomed, community members are sometimes dominated by teachers and they do often lack the skills to perform their roles well (Wolf et al, 1999).

Increased democratization and decentralization in Malawi has led to both conflicts between School Committees and schools and between parents and teachers. Table 10 illustrates the relationships that were reported at the schools where data were collected. While the large majority of the schools and communities indicated that they had good relationships, there were enough who indicated poor relationships to support the tensions which emerged in the comments reported in the next section.

[16] Mean number of years that the School Committee has been in existence: Balaka 4.2; Salima 4.8; Mangochi 3.6.

[17] Mean number of months since the last School Committee meeting: Balaka 2.8; Salima 3.0; Mangochi 2.6.

[18] Mean number of members attending School Committee meetings: Balaka 8; Salima 6; Mangochi 8.

Table 10: Reported Relationships Between School and Community

Relationship	Balaka		Salima		Mangochi	
	School Committee & School	Parents & Teachers	School Committee & School	Parents & Teachers	School Committee & School	Parents & Teachers
Excellent	3%	-	-	-	-	-
Good	61%	65%	70%	53%	78%	74%
O.K.	21%	16%	12%	22%	9%	13%
Poor	15%	19%	18%	25%	10%	13%

Some insight might be gained into this tension by examining Table 11, which describes the recent achievements and activities reported by the School Committees of the schools where data were collected. The great majority of their responses involved the construction of classrooms and teachers' houses and the making of bricks used in those constructions. Given the information already presented on the shortages of classrooms and teachers' houses at these schools (Table 1), it is clear that these are important activities, especially in relationship to the impact that they could have on retaining pupils (Table 2). What was missing from the activities mentioned at any of the schools was the construction of latrines. While comparisons with government data collected in these districts in 1997 suggest that some improvements may have occurred in the relationship between number of classrooms and pupil enrollment and the relationship between the number of teachers' houses and teachers at these schools, the relationship between the number of latrines and pupils appears to have become worse (Table 1). Of these three types of infrastructure, latrines appear to have the closest correlation with a high retention of pupils.

Table 11: Achievements and Activities Reported by the School Committees

Type of Activity/Achievement	Balaka	Salima	Mangochi
None	3%	-	3%
Resolving Parent - Teacher Conflicts	2%	2%	8%
Handling Pupil Pregnancies	2%	-	-
Raising Funds for the School	14%	8%	5%
Organizing School Construction	35%	52%	44%
Organizing Brick Making for the School	35%	34%	35%
Adding Other Things to Improve the School	6%	4%	1%
Encouraging Parents' Support of Pupils	3%	-	4%

Information about Parent Teacher Association's (PTA's) achievements and activities at the schools where data were collected is limited due to the relatively small number of PTAs that existed, a total of only 25 PTAs among all three districts. A mean of only 39 percent of the schools in Balaka had PTAs, 23 percent of those in Salima, and 35 percent of the schools visited in Mangochi. The data that were collected about PTA activities followed the same pattern as that of the School Committees, with most of the organizations' time being devoted to construction and brick making. PTAs did appear to spend a greater proportion of their effort

resolving parent - teacher conflicts[19] than did School Committees, but it is difficult to place great significance on this figure due to the small number involved.

Given new notions of democracy in Malawi, the cost of limiting community participation to these avenues could be increased tensions. Community members feel that they should play a decision-making role in the development of their local schools if they are also being asked to supply their funds and labor. And, to help community members throughout Malawi develop the skills necessary to participate effectively in a democratic society, School Committees and PTAs can provide an avenue through which they can develop those skills because they care enough about the schooling that their children will receive to involve themselves.

However, the primary reason that the role of community members in School Committees and PTAs should to be expanded lies in the impact that their decision-making and monitoring activities could have on the quality of education offered. The criticisms and frustrations with schools reported by parents and pupils in the next section as having an impact on the quality of education that is offered suggest that conflicts do exist, that School Committees and PTAs can provide the structure through which to resolve those conflicts, and that many of those tensions could be avoided if community members played a more active role in monitoring school decisions and practices.

III. WHAT IS QUALITY EDUCATION?

A. What Factors do Teachers, Parents, and Pupils Believe Contribute to Quality Education?

Information about what teachers, parents and pupils believe to be important to quality education was collected at each school by the PEAs and CDAs while they were accumulating basic data about school conditions. In most cases, the data collectors conducted group interviews with a cluster of teachers, parents, and pupils, discussing the issues with each group separately. While the specific comments varied from school to school, remarkably similar patterns were found among the districts in terms of which factors were mentioned, how often, and by whom. Most of the factors that were proposed by teachers, parents, and pupils as key to quality education can be organized into the following categories.

1. Infrastructure

The need for adequate infrastructure to create an environment for quality education was often the first and generally the most frequent response for all three groups. The types of infrastructure mentioned were primarily classrooms, teachers' houses and school furniture, but boreholes, latrines, health clinics, bridges, and even roads were all suggested.

Teachers: *There should be a good learning and teaching atmosphere in terms of classrooms, desks, and teachers' houses.*
The school needs permanent latrines to promote good health.

[19] Percent of activities that related to resolving parent - teacher conflicts: Balaka 35%; Salima 33%; Mangochi 17%.

Parents: *There should be a health centre at the school to monitor the health of our children.*
Adequate classrooms for pupils to learn freely.
Government to give aid in sending construction materials for the blocks since bricks are available.

Pupils: *Nearby water supply for pupils who are coming from further villages.*
We all want to sit at desks in every class.
Classrooms should be enough and good. Classrooms should have real windows with glass.

2. Sufficient Teachers

While an adequate number of teachers was often mentioned by all groups as contributing to a quality education, this was not the dominant issue that might have been expected given the recent expansion of Malawi's education system.

Teachers: *Good number of pupils per teacher, 50 pupils for one teacher.*
More lady teachers are needed in the school.
Adequate teachers, at least 60 pupils per teacher.

Parents: *Some teachers are given classes with a lot of pupils, especially S1-3. So the government should avoid understaffing, since in this situation few pupils are attentive.*

Pupils: *There is need for more teachers at the school.*

3. Teacher Training, Salary, and Incentives

The various types of support given to teachers were often described, especially by teachers, as key ingredients in creating quality education. The types of support include training, encompassing pre-service, in-service and refresher courses, higher salaries, allowances for things such as supplies and travel, and incentives for teachers who perform their jobs well.

Teachers: *Temporary teacher should be well-trained.*
Better salaries for teachers to avoid them leading a miserable life.
Regular refresher courses.

Parents: *Government should employ well-qualified teachers and not the type of teachers who have been sent to our schools in the last three years.*
Salary should be paid in time to teachers to avoid teachers' absenteeism.

Pupils: *Well trained teachers to be posted at the school.*
Teachers should be sent to a school where they speak the mother language.

4. Sufficient Teaching and Learning Materials

An adequate amount of teaching and learning materials, including the delivery of the materials to the school, was perceived as an important aspect of quality education by teachers, parents, and pupils.

Teachers: *Teachers should have enough teaching and learning materials, especially teachers' guides for all subjects.*
The school needs a library and radio for children to use.

Parents: *Parents should support their children by providing them with learning materials.*
Adequate teaching and learning materials - exercise books, textbooks, and writing materials for pupils.

Pupils: *School materials should be delivered at the school rather than using pupils to collect them from other schools; this disturbs pupil learning.*
Adequate notebooks such that most of the time pupils don't have to stay away from school until the notebooks are bought.
The school needs science materials for experiments and the like.

5. Relationships between Teachers and Community Members, Pupils, and District Education Offices of the Ministry of Education

The relationships which create the context in which education occurs were seen as key to quality education by most of those who were asked. However, the frequency of proposing a relationship as important to quality education, whether a teacher-community, teacher-pupil, or teacher-DEO relationship varied among the three groups, as did which type of relationship.

Teachers: *PEAs should visit schools frequently to solve problems.*
School Committees should assist teachers in addressing development work at the school.
Pupils should respect their teachers.
Class supervision by headteachers and PEAs should be intensified.

Parents: *Children should be free to report to the headteacher if a teacher does something not worth doing. The headteacher should exercise power over such teachers without fear.*
A tendency of getting bribes from children by teachers must be discouraged.
PTAs should be established in schools for parents to take part more in improving the quality of education.

Pupils: *Teachers should stop falling in love with school girls.*
Teachers should answer pupils' questions well and inform the pupils politely.
Chiefs must participate and work hard in self-help projects in order to build more school blocks.

6. Classroom Learning - How Time is Used, Attendance of Teachers and Pupils, Indicators of Learning

Although all three groups frequently mentioned aspects of classroom learning and this was the factor of most importance for pupils, the teaching and learning environment still was given less significance than would be expected in a discussion about quality education. Some of the comments focused on what actually happens in classrooms, while others listed criteria for a quality education, such as a high number of pupils passing exams and/or being accepted to secondary school or pupils who can read and write Chichewa or English by a specific standard.

Teachers: *Punctuality by both teachers and pupils.*
Detailed lesson plans.
Encourage pupils to speak English in class and outside the classroom.

Parents: *Pupils should be strictly taught how to read and write both Chichewa and English.*
Children passing examinations with flying colours.
Pupils should go on to secondary school.
Teachers should really teach the pupils adequately following timetables and strictly supervising pupils' work rather than wasting pupils' time chatting with fellow teachers.

Pupils: *When a teacher is absent other teachers should take over the class and not just leave that class idling or just give revision exercises instead of being taught new work.*
Marking of exercises must be done by teachers all of the time.
Teachers should always be in class when it is time to teach.
Pupils should not be sent back home when they are late. Instead they should be punished after classes.

7. Parent Support for and Encouragement of Pupils

All three groups seemed well aware of ways that parents and communities can support pupils through encouragement, provision of food, and/or giving them time to study, and all three groups presented parental support as a key ingredient of a quality education.

Teachers: *Parents should be encouraged to buy school uniforms.*
Children must eat something before coming to school.
Parents must send their children to school early.

Parents: *Parents should encourage lazy children to go to school every day.*
Keeping the child smart when going to school by buying soap for him.
Parents should be on the forefront in advising the pupils to have good behavior.

Pupils: *Parents should not give children hard work for school in order to have enough time for study.*
Parents to make sure that they give us food when going to or coming back from school.
Parents should provide shoes to avoid contacting worms in toilets.

8. Extra Curricular Activities

Many of the responses, especially those by pupils, included the suggestion that extra curricular activities contribute to the quality of education offered at a school.

Teachers: *Every school must have clubs and societies which can assist in developing the skills in children.*

Parents: *At this school pupils sometimes spend two learning weeks working at the estate to have sports materials so the government should provide sports materials.*

Pupils: *Plenty of games to refresh the brain.*
The school should have balls for extra curricular activities.

B. Differences among Teacher, Parent, and Pupil Perceptions about What Contributes to Quality Education

Typically the list of factors supplied by each group, teachers, parents and pupils, stressed different elements of the educational context as can be seen in the following examples.

The teachers' list from one school included:

> *Having adequate staff. Refresher courses for teachers. Enough teaching materials. Good houses for teachers to attract more teachers. Teachers' salaries should be raised to avoid teachers engaged in part-time activities. Food to be provided to pupils as the government once did.*

The parents' list from another school included:

> *There must be enough qualified teachers. There must be teaching and learning materials. Good and enough classrooms. Pupils should be loyal to teachers. Pupils should go on to secondary school. Parents should insist their children to go to school. Teachers should not get drunk during working time. Teachers should be provided with good accommodations.*

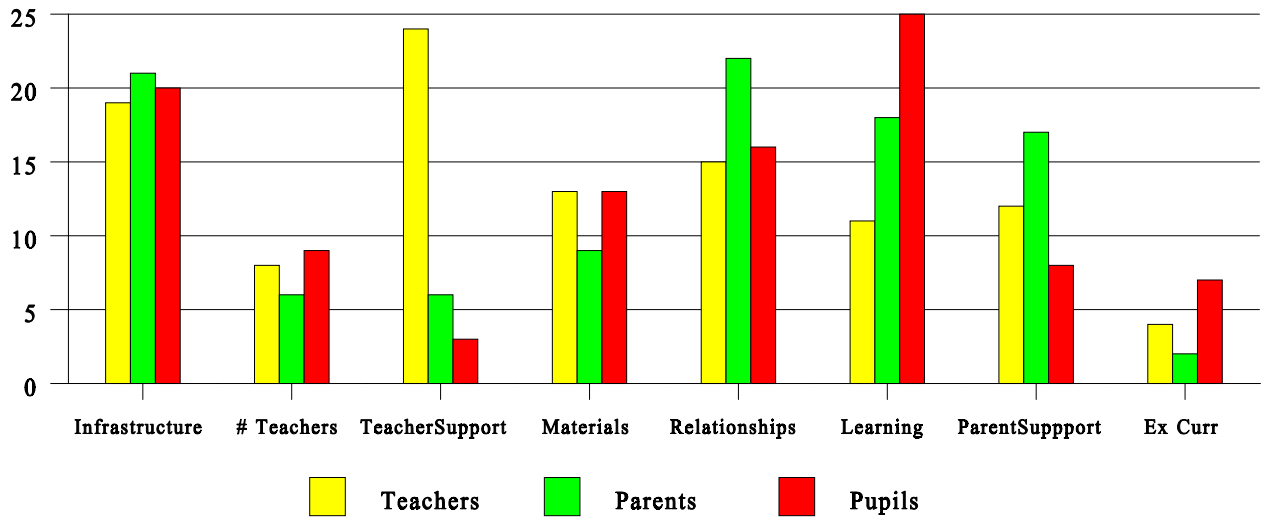
The pupils' list from a third school included:

> *The school should provide books, pencils, and rulers. There should be desks for all pupils. It should have balls, a netball and football ground. Teachers should not propose to school girls. Parents should provide good clothes. Teachers should not beat children.*

All of the data from all three districts follow the same patterns of relative frequencies for the key factors, the differences in frequency among the districts for many of the factors being only a few percentage points. Because so few differences were found in the frequencies of factors being mentioned and in which groups tended to emphasize which factors, the data from the three districts have been combined and average frequencies calculated for each of the major factors proposed as contributing to quality education. By comparing these average percentages, which are charted in Chart 5, relative differences among what teachers, parents, and pupils believe to be important can be recognized.

As Chart 5 indicates, infrastructure was mentioned as being key to quality education about 20

Chart 5: Relative Frequencies of Factors Mentioned by Teachers, Parents, and Pupils



percent of the time by all three groups — teachers, parents, and pupils. The only strong variation in what types of infrastructure were proposed by the three groups was the tendency for pupils to specifically mention desks as a key piece of infrastructure.

Chart 5 also shows that some of the other factors also varied relatively little among the groups. For example, teachers and pupils, the two groups who best know the realities of current classrooms, mentioned the need for sufficient teachers and the need for adequate learning and teaching materials with almost the exact same frequency. Extra curricular activities was the factor least commonly mentioned as playing an important role in quality education by both teachers and parents and, although pupils placed more importance on extra curricular activities, it was still the factor that they mentioned less frequently than all but one other.

For some of the other factors, strong variations were found among the three groups. The factor most frequently mentioned by teachers was teacher support, including training, salary, and incentives for teachers. Neither the parents nor the pupils saw support for teachers as an important factor. Teachers listed many aspects of this factor:

Teachers should be given incentives like salary acceleration and any other rewards, especially to hard working ones.
In-service teacher education.
Teachers should be given chalk, transport and lunch allowances.
There is a need to orient teachers on the use of the new curriculum which teachers use through trail and error methods.
Teachers should be given loans and advances to assist them in sorting out some of their financial problems.

Some of the frequency with which teachers offered these needs as key to educational quality may have had to do with who had asked the question, as many of the data collectors were PEAs from the District Education Office and teachers may have been using this opportunity to send a message about their needs to the Ministry of Education.

Pupils' comments tended to focus heavily on what happens in the classroom: attendance, how class time is used, and what learning can be said to have occurred. In some cases, positive learning activities or outcomes were mentioned:

Subjects should be properly taught and at the right time as indicated in the timetable.
Passing of examinations.
English should be given more time in the timetable.

In most cases, however, the language involved was negative: quality education was not having certain things happen in the classroom.

Teachers must not leave the classroom anytime they want and just assign children to read Chichewa books.
Teachers should be punctual; mostly children start their lessons very late.
Teachers do not welcome questions from pupils and are not friendly, so pupils fail to ask questions as they are always afraid.

Parents also tended to see what is going on in the classroom as a major indicator of quality education.

Teachers should not be found doing their own personal things during lessons, leaving the pupils unattended.
Parents want good mannered teachers who are also well qualified.
Pupils should be kept busy learning throughout the day and not be left playing.

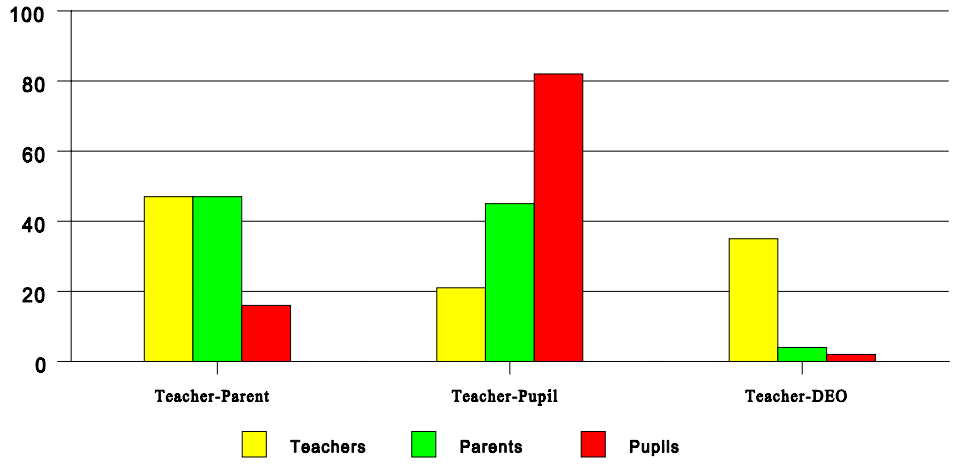
What is interesting is the relatively low importance teachers placed on classroom learning, the place where their role is paramount. Parents, on the other hand, tended to stress the importance of their support to pupils, the factor which highlights their role, more than the other two groups. Parents proposed that they made an important contribution to quality education:

> *Parents should support their children by providing them with learning materials.*
> *Parents should not give children hard work after school in order for them to have enough time for study.*
> *Parents should provide food for pupils.*
> *Parents should tell the pupils the advantages of schooling and motivate the pupils.*
> *Parents should discourage children from going to the lake to catch fish.*

Of course, after many years of a very successful social mobilization campaign which helped communities recognize their role in education and become more actively involved, it would be odd if parents had not been aware of these as appropriate responses to questions about contributing factors to quality education.

Parents also stressed the relationships within which education takes place, especially their relationships with teachers. School-related relationships also were a factor of importance to both teachers and pupils. However, if examined more closely, each of the three groups stressed different types of relationships as being key to their concept of quality education. Chart 6 illustrates differences in the frequencies with which teacher-parent, teacher-pupil, and teacher-DEO relationships were mentioned as important to educational quality.

Chart 6: Percent Proposing Types of Key Educational Relationships



When teachers talked about good relationships, they generally meant with the District Education Office:

> *Untrained teachers require frequent supervision by the PEA and the DEO.*
> *Disorganized transfers amongst teachers as planned by the DEO disturb teachers.*
> *There is limited supervision by the PEAs that intensifies the teachers' work, therefore there is a need for frequent supervision.*

When teachers did mention relationships with the community, they stressed the support they felt the community needed to give to the school or how they, teachers, could help the parents do a better job.

> *Advice given to parents during PTA meetings.*
> *Parents should cooperate with teachers.*

In one school where the teachers offered *parents must respect teachers* as a key component of quality education, the parents proposed *teachers must be cooperative with parents* as an important factor.

When parents talked about good relationships with teachers, they most frequently mentioned both community involvement in activities to support the school and interactions with teachers about pupil behavior and learning.

> *Teachers need to consider practicing parents' advice about pupils.*
> *The School Committee should be allowed to hold staff meetings on their own and invite the headteacher when it is necessary.*
> *The school should have a PTA and both the PTA and School Committee should know their roles to avoid collision.*

Teachers seldom included their relationships with pupils as key to quality education and, when they did, it was almost always to suggest what pupils needed to do to maintain or improve the relationship.

> *Pupils must be obedient to teachers.*
> *Teachers' dedication to duty only comes when pupils show commitment toward learning, pay attention, and show interest towards what the teachers delivers.*
> *Pupils should work hard in class, dress properly, and obey teachers.*

Parents and pupils, on the other hand, emphasized this relationship, the teacher-pupil relationship, as key to educational quality. Sometimes this was worded in a positive manner:

> *Teachers must be kind to their pupils and help those in need.*
> *Teachers should love their pupils by helping them where they find problems.*

But, in most cases, the statements about teacher-pupil relationships were worded as the avoidance of behaviors, the description of which do not paint a pretty picture of pupil life in many schools.

Parents:
> *Teachers must not give corporal punishment to pupils.*
> *Teachers should not come to school drunk.*
> *Teachers have lost their respect, discipline and popularity due to immoral behaviors such as drinking with pupils, love making with pupils, and smoking Indian hemp together with pupils.*
> *Teachers should keep a social distance with school girls.*
> *Teachers are selling themselves, writing exams for the pupils for money or for love.*

Lady teachers who also have their husband teaching at the same school should stop beating good-looking girls found in the class of their husbands thinking that they are in love.

Pupils: *Pupils would prefer sound advice rather than being whipped if they make a mistake in their exercises.*
Teachers must stop punishing children when they have refused to do some personal work at their houses when they have knocked off.
Some teachers' tendency of proposing to school girls needs to be discouraged.
Teachers should avoid beating pupils.
Teachers should not use pupils for their personal issues.
Pupils need school materials like pencils, ballpoints, and note books, but those are mostly sold by teachers to grocery men in far distant places.
Teachers should not drink during working hours.
Friendship between teachers and school girls should be stopped.

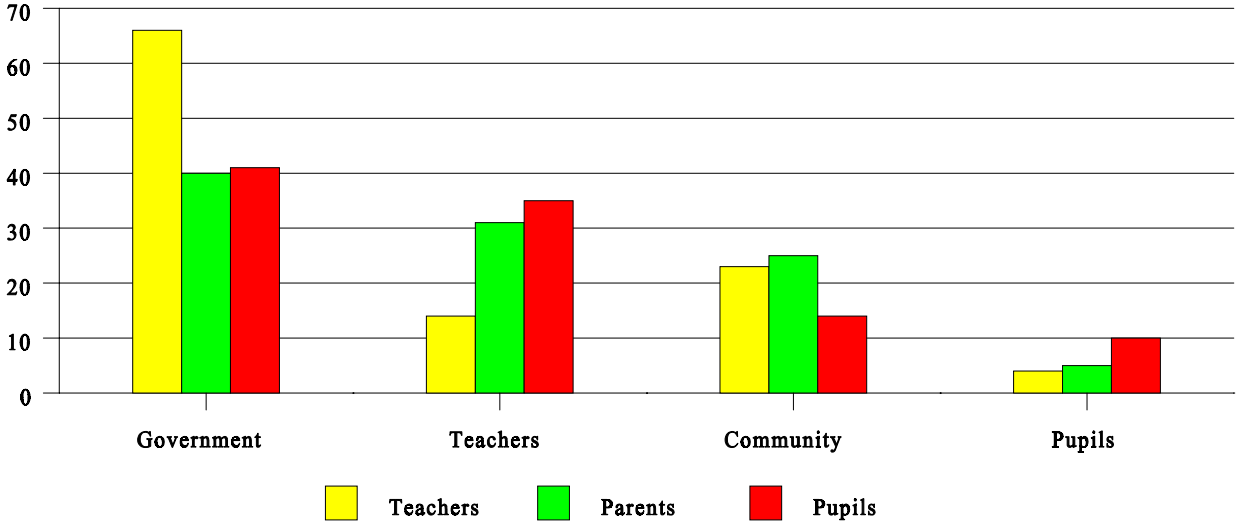
C. Who is Responsible for Creating Quality Education?

The differences among the educational factors described by teachers, parents, and pupils provide a measure of who each group sees as responsible for creating quality education. The responses given were coded according to who would be responsible for producing that specific element: government, teacher, community, or pupil. For example, the government can be assumed to be the provider of learning and teaching materials and teacher training. Teacher performance and teacher behavior in the classroom are produced by teachers. Communities provide breakfast for pupils or membership in the PTA, and pupil attendance and pupil behavior are produced by pupils.

As Chart 7 demonstrates, teachers place far greater importance on the government's supply of factors that will create educational quality than do either the parents or the pupils[20]. Parents, and especially pupils, see the role of teachers as key to quality education, while teachers, interestingly, do not. Parents tend to see their roles as a more important factor than do either teachers or pupils, and pupils tend to see their roles as more significant than do either teachers or parents.

[20] As mentioned before, some of this emphasis may be due to the fact that district government personnel were collecting the data and teachers may have attempted to use this as an opportunity to send a message about their needs to the government.

Chart 7 : Percent of Who is Held Responsible for Providing Quality Education



Where responsibility for quality education is seen to reside is an important piece of information because individuals will not make the effort to create changes when they feel that it is not their responsibility. Teachers appear to see the responsibility for a quality education primarily as the government's, not theirs. Unless teachers come to understand and acknowledge the role that they can play in the quality of education and take responsibility for the ways through which they can alter the type of education being produced, then attempts to change their practices and behavior will have little impact. Their perception contrasts sharply with that of the parents and pupils, both of those groups having placed much of the responsibility for quality education with teacher performance. All of the other differences among who is seen to be responsible for quality education are insignificant in contrast to this major gap in perceptions.

Why do teachers not talk about their own responsibility in creating quality education? Why do parents and pupils place so much of the responsibility on teachers? Some of the answers to these questions can be found in the quotes throughout Section III. Teachers feel that they cannot do their jobs well without more support from the Ministry of Education; they believe that they can do little without, especially, more training and more pay. Parents and pupils often define quality education according to what it is not, and what they say again and again is that quality education is not poor teacher practices and behaviors.

The Ministry of Education is aware that the teachers in many communities do not feel that they can do their jobs without more support from the government. They are struggling to improve the support that they give to teachers. District Education Office personnel are already overburdened with tasks as they work to offer more support to teachers; they cannot, therefore, be asked to expand their role to monitor teacher practices and behavior more closely. Parents, although they feel that the responsibility for quality education rests on teachers as well as government, are not involved in constructive approaches to improving teacher performance. The lists of activities provided by the School Committees did not include monitoring teachers' attendance, classrooms practices, and/or behavior. Parents do not appear to take their complaints about teachers to the School Committee, which might act as a channel to the District Education Office or help parents and teachers negotiate changes. PTAs show some indications of becoming involved in these

ways, but there are only a small percentage of schools with an active PTA. If parents became more involved in monitoring teacher performance, it might both lessen their frustrations with the school and improve the learning environment for their children.

IV. CONCLUSION

Hopefully these data can help to guide the decisions and efforts made by the Ministry of Education and SMC-EQ over the next few years. Many of the obstacles to a quality education documented in these schools are ones that the Ministry and SMC are well aware of and already working to overcome. There are a few, however, that have neither been highlighted in the Ministry of Education data collected in 1997 nor by current SMC-EQ activities. They are:

1. *The lack of latrines at the schools*. Of the three infrastructure factors for which statistical analysis could be conducted, the number of latrines per pupil had a higher correlation with the ratio of Standard 8 enrollments to Standard 1 enrollments than did either the number of classrooms per pupil or the number of teachers' houses per teacher. Yet, while School Committees and PTAs reported working on classroom and teacher house construction and the making of bricks to aid their schools, none reported building latrines. Pupil health and, probably, school dropout could be positively impacted by urging Committees to re-focus some of their energies in this direction.

2. *Place more teachers in the lower few standards of schools***.** While both the Ministry of Education and community-based projects, such as the SMC-EQ, put effort into discouraging pupil dropout, the current rate of dropout in the schools of Malawi is unlikely to improve radically in the near future. Given that fact, and in light of current attempts to develop an informed and competent civil society in Malawi, efforts to improve the quality of education could be refocused to better address those pupils who will not complete their primary education. While the government is struggling to provide enough teachers to meet a 60 pupils per teacher ratio in each school, traditional notions of quality education based on the number of pupils who pass their exams and/or are accepted to secondary school produce a disproportionate allocation of teachers, especially qualified and/or male teachers, to the upper standards. When a ratio of Standard 8 to Standard 1 pupils is used as an indication of how well schools retain their pupils, the total number of teachers in a school per pupil is only slightly correlated with a greater percent of pupils in Standard 8. On the other hand, the number of teachers per pupil in Standard 1 is extremely correlated (+.87) with a high ratio of Standard 8 to Standard 1 pupils. Communities and teachers could be educated to the advantages of emphasizing the lower standards where most of their children are found. Policymakers could consider providing guidelines or requirements for how headteachers assign teachers to standards within schools.

3. *Decision-making and teacher monitoring roles for the School Committee and PTA***.** While making bricks, providing time for homework, and sending children to school with food help to achieve a quality education, these activities cost parents and the benefits to them may never be realized if their children leave school before any recognizable learning has been achieved. Resentment and conflict between parents and teachers can only increase if there is no organization for resolving local conflicts and providing community members with decision-making responsibility. If School Committees and PTAs only function to provide funds and physical labor for schools, they do not allow the opportunity for community members to develop the skills necessary for the growth of civil society and democratic participation roles. Encouraging School Committees and PTAs to play a greater role in what happens at schools

could increase community members' short-term sense of benefit and allow more significant participation. It also could create a school environment in which it is far easier to achieve quality education.